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Mr C Dark
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Dark

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: physical education (PE)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 17 and 18 May 2011 to look at work in PE.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of 10 lessons and other activities.

The overall effectiveness of PE is satisfactory with good features. The department is improving rapidly.

Achievement in PE

Achievement in PE is satisfactory.

- Students attain the expected levels by the end of Key Stage 3 with small numbers of those identified as gifted and talented working above this, especially in games activities. Students observed in a Year 7 dance lesson, as part of the school's performing arts status, were working well above expected levels for their age, especially in the quality of their performances and choreography skills. Attainment in GCSE PE has been on an improving trend for the last three years, although remains below the national average. A new BTEC course has been introduced and students are on target to attain in line with the national average, including in the higher grades.

- Progress is satisfactory overall but is too variable because of inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. Where teaching is good or better, students make good and at times rapid progress. Students make the most progress in acquiring and developing their performance skills although some are showing rapid development in their ability to observe, evaluate and feedback on their own and others' work. For example, in one Year 7 athletics lesson, boys were showing rapid improvement in their sprinting technique because of the quality of resources to help them evaluate their own performances and the high-quality individual feedback provided by the teacher. However, most students are over-dependent on teachers and can only explore ideas and tasks with support. Higher attaining students are starting to work independently and successfully take a variety of roles in lessons.
- Most students have positive attitudes towards the subject reflected in the good relationships between staff and students and the good and improving participation rates, especially in Key Stage 4. Students have good opportunities to influence the direction of the subject through surveys and their roles as sports councillors, sports captains. As a result of students' feedback, positive changes have been made to activity choices in core Key Stage 4 lessons and in the breadth of activities available as part of the extra-curricular programme.

Quality of teaching in PE

The quality of teaching in PE is satisfactory overall, although it is too inconsistent. A small minority of outstanding and inadequate teaching was observed.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge of activities and examination expectations. However, this is not always used effectively to challenge students' learning and thinking or to give specific enough feedback that enables all students to understand their next steps in learning. Marking and feedback during GCSE and BTEC work are consistently good. Comments are comprehensive and enable students to understand their strengths and what they need to do to improve further.
- In the inadequate lessons, expectations were unrealistic, work was not matched to meet the needs of students with different levels of ability and limited feedback was given to enable students to make progress.
- An area of good practice is the introduction of individual PE plans for a small group of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The plans ensure that provision is adapted to meet their needs and they are fully included in lessons. The deployment and quality of support provided by the teaching assistant for individuals and small groups of students are strengths of the provision.
- The use of assessment is developing quickly but is at an early stage of recording, monitoring and analysing information. Consequently, the department does not have a secure view of students' progress over time, particularly in Key Stage 4 core lessons, and information is not yet being used consistently to plan work that matches students' needs or to extend

their prior learning. Assessment is currently focused on activities and performance skills and misses the opportunity to recognise the wider aspects of students' progress, such as their leadership or decision-making skills. Students know their targets but are less secure on what they have to do to improve their work.

Quality of the curriculum in PE

The quality of the curriculum in PE is satisfactory.

- The curriculum meets the expectation for two hours of PE in Key Stage 3, with an additional hour a week for dance through the performing arts programme. However, students who only access core Key Stage 4 PE lessons fall just below this expectation. Although sixth-form students do not have a formal programme of PE, the school has made good provision for their participation through links with the local leisure centre.
- The curriculum has been extended well to better match the needs and interests of students in Key Stage 4 with the introduction of a sports leader award and the BTEC PE course. However, the Key Stage 3 programme is dominated by games-based activities and has not been adapted to meet the expectations of the new National Curriculum. Limited use is made of information and communication technology opportunities, although the school's focus on developing students' personal learning and thinking skills is starting to emerge in some lessons.
- A good programme of extra-curricular and enrichment activities is available that has been extended well through links with the sports partnership, especially for non-traditional sports such as archery, yoga and horse riding. The head of department and sports coordinator work together effectively to continuously adapt the programme to meet the needs and interests of students.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in PE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in PE is satisfactory with good features.

- The new head of department has an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the department and in the short time she has been in post has set a clear and ambitious direction of improvement. She and the second in department work extremely well together, have complementary skills and together they are leading strongly and driving improvements at pace. They are both good role models for teaching.
- In a short period of time the subject leaders have implemented a programme of peer observations to share identified strengths in teaching methods, have introduced new assessment methods and have started to raise the expectations and aspirations of staff and students. However, it is too early to see the impact of this in bringing about greater consistency in teaching or increasing the rate of learning across the whole department.

- PE and school sport have a good profile around the school which is improving. Students' successes are recognised and celebrated through displays and in assemblies. Good links have been created with local sports clubs and the sports partnership to promote the subject and encourage greater participation. The school's specialist status in performing arts is leading to high-quality provision, opportunities and levels of performance in dance.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- eliminating the inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning so that there is a higher proportion of good and better teaching and students are helped to make good or better progress
- reviewing the assessment procedures to include wider aspects of students' achievements and using the information to plan work that consistently matches students' needs
- ensuring that evaluation of the department's work focuses on the impact for students' learning and progress.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop PE in the school.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Judith Rundle
Her Majesty's Inspector